



Captain John Smith's Chesapeake Bay

## **An Excerpt from Captain John Smith's *The Generall Historie of Virginia, New England, and the Summer Isles***

(edited to include modern spellings)

Of mines we were all ignorant, but a few beavers, otters, bears, martins and minks we found, and in diverse places that abundance of fish, lying so thick with their heads above the water, as for want of nets (our barge driving amongst them) we attempted to catch them with a frying pan: but we found it a bad instrument to catch fish with: neither better fish, more plenty, nor more variety for small fish, had any of us ever seen in any place so swimming in the water, but they are not to be caught with frying pans. Some small cod also we did see swim close by the shore by Smiths Iles, and some as high as Riccards Clifts. And some we have found dead upon the shore.

To express all our quarrels, treacheries and encounters amongst those savages I should be too tedious: but in brief, at all times we so encountered them, and curbed their insolencies, that they concluded with presents to purchase peace; yet we lost not a man: at our first meeting our captain ever observed this order, to demand their bows and arrows, swords, mantles and furs, with some child or two for hostage, whereby we could quickly perceive, when they intended any villainy.

Having finished this discovery (though our victual was near spent) he intended to see his imprisonment-acquaintances upon the river Rappahannock, by many called Tappahannock, but our boat by reason of the ebb, chancing to ground upon a many shoals lying in the entrances, we spied many fishes lurking in the reeds: our captain sporting himself by nailing them to the ground with his sword, set us all a fishing in that manner: thus we took more in one hour than we could eat in a day.

But it chanced our captain taking a fish from his sword (not knowing her condition) being much of the fashion of a Thornback, but a long tail like a riding rod, whereon the middest is a most poisoned sting, of two or three inches long, bearded like a saw on each side, which she struck into the wrist of his arm near an inch and a half: no blood nor wound was seen, but a little blue spot, but the torment was instantly so extreme, that in four hours had so swollen his hand, arm and shoulder, we all with much sorrow concluded his funeral, and prepared his grave in an island by, as himself directed: yet it pleased God by a precious oil Docter Russell at the first applied to it when he sounded it with probe, (ere night) his tormenting pain was so well assuaged that he ate of the fish to his supper, which gave no less joy and content to us than ease to himself. For which we called the Island Stingray Isle after the name of the fish.

The original text was taken from:

Smith, John. *The Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles: with the names of the Adventurers, Planters, and Governours from their first beginning An: 1584. to this present 1624. Travels and Works.* 1910. Ed. Edward Arber. Vol. 2. New York: Burt Franklin, 1967. 418–419. 2 vols.